

The Do's and Don'ts of Managing People

Striking the right leadership balance

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All pastors have staff members or volunteers they oversee. Some are great at recruiting people and empowering them with responsibility and authority. Unfortunately, that is sometimes where it ends. Once team members are out of sight, the leader doesn't think about them again.

Other church leaders invest regularly and strategically in their teams. But in their efforts to help, sometimes they over-manage and never really let go so each person can grow and thrive.

As a result of these two scenarios, management often gets a bad rap. Team members who are trying to spread their wings feel controlled by a micromanaging leader. And leaders who freely delegate and empower may think their job is to provide leadership, not management.

I get it. There's truth in both perspectives. But perhaps the real problem is in our understanding of what it means to "manage" people. Authors Gino Wickman and René Boer provided great perspective when they wrote, "You can't 'manage someone.' Management is not what you do *to* someone; it's what you provide *for* someone."

Therein lies a key distinction. So, what does this look like practically? Consider these do's and don'ts of managing people:

The Do's

Do provide clear expectations. Good management starts by ensuring team members have clear expectations. Providing a written role description that articulates expectations and responsibilities is a good first step.

Do offer regular encouragement. Everyone wants to feel appreciated. When that appreciation comes from a boss or manager, it gives team members an extra boost to keep going and keep growing. It also increases engagement and a sense of loyalty to the leader and the church.

Do give helpful coaching. Coaching is how leaders pull the best out of their team members. By asking good questions and offering important insights, leaders give others the coaching they need to maximize their potential.

Do empower with accountability. Empowerment involves releasing opportunity and responsibility to others. Accountability involves expecting people to do what they said they would do, and to meet clearly defined expectations.

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Do celebrate wins. When a church team member reaches a goal, experiences a success, or achieves a personal or professional milestone, celebrate. Good management doesn't just focus on the task; it focuses on the victory.

Most of these things can be accomplished through a weekly one-on-one oversight meeting with direct reports. This is some of the most important time I spend in my week. It keeps communication lines open, and it provides the encouragement and coaching my team needs, when they need it most.

The Don'ts

Don't be controlling. When management becomes a way of controlling others, you've crossed a line. People are not your puppets. They are partnering with you in achieving a noble vision together. Treat them with respect, and demonstrate that you trust them.

Don't micromanage. Micromanagement happens when we over-monitor and over-remind. In other words, we constantly look over people's shoulders, and we constantly remind them what to do. It's another way of controlling the people we lead, and it generally demotivates and demoralizes the team.

Don't insist on your technique. Because managers are often good with planning, systems and processes, they can easily impose their techniques onto the people they oversee. Be careful not to squelch the creativity right out of the people you provide management to. Focus on outcomes more than techniques.

Don't set goals for them. People are much more likely to own the goals they personally set. Serve as a coach to goal setting, not a drill sergeant who tells people what goals to set.

Don't limit opportunity. Your church team members need the opportunity to grow, try new things, develop their skills, and pursue assignments that will stretch them and make them better leaders. Be careful not to place a lid on their development just because an opportunity doesn't fit neatly in your predetermined box.

When Moses listened to the advice of his father-in-law, Jethro, he had to abandon his approach of trying to handle all the cases the people brought him. Instead, Exodus 18:25-26 says, "He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves."

Moses handed off responsibility to a group of leaders who helped carry the load in a significant way. Rather than controlling and micromanaging these leaders, Moses let them decide cases themselves so he could focus on what mattered most: leading and teaching God's people.

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